

LOS ANGELES COUNTY VETERANS ADVISORY COMMISSION

1816 S. FIGUEROA STREET
LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA 90015



Ruth A. Wong
Director

MINUTES REGULAR MEETING Wednesday, March 11, 2020

Present:

Absent:

Commissioners

Patricia Jackson-Kelley
Hector Elizalde
Michael McDowell
Dennis Tucker
Tom Lasser
Tess Banko
Brittanie Moore

Commissioners

Ruel Fuentecilla
Joe Leal
Thomas O'Shaughnessy

County Department

Military and Veterans Affairs

Ruth Wong, Director
Deshawn Yancy, Intern

Call to Order, Pledge of Allegiance and Approval of Minutes

Chair Patricia Jackson-Kelley called the meeting to order at 1:35 p.m. The Pledge of Allegiance was led by Cristina Garcia, Program Coordinator U.S Vets W.V.O.P.

Roll Call

There was a total of 7 Commissioners at the meeting – there was a quorum.

Chairman's Report

Chair Patricia Jackson-Kelley introduced newly appointed Commissioner Brittanie Moore, former active duty Marine.

Chair Patricia Jackson-Kelley stated that she attended the Orange County Black History Program where Bobbie McDonald, chair of the Orange County Veteran Advisory Council, hosted a salute to 150 youth highlighted as future leaders.

Chair Patricia Jackson-Kelley stated that she participated in Sexual Harassment Training at the Loma Linda V.A Hospital by Lisa Robo, Program Manager for Women Veterans; she planned on presenting at Los Angeles Veterans Collaborative, but it was canceled. Chair stated she would like to present to many disciplines in the future.

Chair Patricia Jackson-Kelley stated she was contacted by the 369 Historical Society of New York, where she was to be honored at a program slated for 03/21/2020, however, the program coordinator Major General James passed away and the program has been postponed.

Chair Patricia Jackson-Kelley stated she is being honored by the El Camino College Hall of Fame, and will be sending out information for distribution to the Commissioners.

Chair Patricia Jackson-Kelley stated she will be receiving the Goodwill Ambassador award at the LAX Sheraton Hotel on April 25, 2020.

Homeless Update

Commissioner Elizalde reported the following: On February 29, 2020 Los Angeles County Supervisor Kathryn Barger held a Homeless Forum in the San Gabriel Valley, which featured a round table discussion inviting the public to listen to updates and provided suggestions on how the community can help. Commissioner Elizalde reported the following issue: land where housing can be built and community residents who are not willing to have a homeless shelter within their neighborhoods.

Commissioner Elizalde encouraged fellow commissioners to be involved and stated he will send along clips regarding homeless issues.

Commissioner Lasser added that Supervisor Hahn for the 4th District was able to secure two acres in Norwalk/Downey and received \$22 million with plans to construct a 100-unit veteran apartment complex and stated it would be ideal to have one or two in each supervisorial district.

Adulting Classes

Commissioner Tucker reported that on February 20, 2020 he met with Dr. Laura Perez Mary Ann Roman of Los Angeles Southwest College and noted the following components will be added to the class: financial literacy, budgeting, and job search. Commissioner Tucker is scheduled to meet again with the Los Angeles Southwest College team on March 12, 2020 and estimates by mid-April a package will be in place for approval at the state level. Commissioner Tucker noted the class would be certificate based and asked Dr. Perez to brief the Commission in May, with classes scheduled to begin in June.

Commissioner Tucker asked the commission to think about filling the class for the second cohort with veterans from their respective areas.

Commissioner Banko commented on how the Adulting Classes can be tied into the VPAN's mission of servicing veterans at community colleges and posed the question, how will the class be funded? Commissioner Tucker stated he is a part of strategic planning for VPAN and has a tie in to the community colleges in mind and revealed the classes will be funded through grants with the aim of getting homeless veterans in the classes.

Commissioner McDowell commented with continuing education, research shows there must be a "carrot" [draw] and found being able to monetize via CRA, credits from the Community Reinvestment Act, will involve banks which have to commit to life skills/finance program building.

Strategic Planning Report – Goal I, Objective 1

Commissioner Lasser described the strategic plan as an organizational tool with four sections: my involved, membership, marketing, and promoting the commission/ MVA. Commissioner Lasser encouraged word of mouth, spreading the word about the commission and signing in to add new emails to mailing list.

Partner with Public Libraries to provide benefits to Veterans

Commissioner Banko stated that she spoke with VPAN organizer Jim Zenner of the Department of Mental Health on implementing touch points in the library system. Commissioner Banko stated they are still being consulted on technology and are looking iPad sign-in with Echo Link technology to be integrated in the library system.

Commissioner Elizalde stated most libraries now have a Veteran Resource Center and they need to maximize reaching veterans through resource centers. Commissioner Elizalde stated currently City Libraries are charged with staffing the Veteran Resource Centers with representatives from the Department of Military and Veteran Affairs who visit libraries and establish community volunteers to get veterans in to receive services as if they came to Bob Hope Patriotic Hall.

Commissioner Elizalde revealed CalVet is also involved with libraries and wants to formalize the relationship with CalVet and the Commission to establish a performance standard for the libraries. Commissioner Elizalde asked permission of the chair to call Anthony Rodriguez of CalVet.

Anthony Rodriguez, Regional Field Agent, CalVet, stated the Vet Connected Library Program has been around for several years and exist within 14 libraries in Los Angeles County. The program is a state library and CalVet joint program where the libraries receive a grant under the condition they conduct events for veterans. The program is run by volunteers at libraries and Anthony conducts training for the volunteers once a year, upcoming training in April 2020. Anthony revealed veterans are generally referred to County Veteran Service officers and provided a flyer to the commission on County and City libraries currently participating with services offered, and noted each respective County/City can apply for the grant. Anthony noted the City of Monrovia won the Library of the Year Award 2019 and mentioned their robust program.

Commissioner Elizalde closed the CalVet Connected Library presentation noting he was unaware that the Department of Military and Veteran Affairs provided the service and encouraged General Ruth Wong to have each organization within Bob Hope Patriotic Hall tell the commission how they can work together.

Commissioner Banko asked the commission if there was a printed version of the services offered at Bob Hope Patriotic Hall.

Director Ruth Wong replied stating there was and it would be provided to the commissioners.

Public Comments

Jonna Lewis, Special Assistant to Director Los Angeles County Department of Child Support Services. Jonna stated that her department provides free services to the public regarding child support. The department has no income or eligibility requirements. Jonna stated services are provided to the community by 300+ specially trained ambassadors and clients are provided the same services as someone who comes into their offices. Jonna distributed a flyer on the ambassador program to the commission.

In response to Jonna, Commissioner Lasser asked if there were any special programs for veterans or family members. Jonna stated there are no special programs, but they are partnered with the Department of Military and Veteran Affairs and Superior Court in hosting a Family Law Event geared towards veterans.

In response to Jonna, Commissioner Banko stated the commission has discussed identifying veterans in the past and asked if there have been any additional conversations around doing so. Jonna responded that she was not aware, but offered her contact information to be of assistance.

Antonio Chapa, Board Deputy, 1st District started by acknowledging all women present and all women veterans who have served in recognition of National Women's Month- March. Board Deputy Chapa went on to highlight the following updates from the 1st Supervisorial District:

- Supervisor Hilda Solis's newly appointed Veteran's Advisory Commissioner Brittanie Moore.
- Supervisor Solis will be hosting the 4th Annual Veterans Resource Expo on July 24, 2020 at the Fairplex in Pomona, all are welcome, 2,000 guests in attendance last year with the goal to double that number this year.

- Acknowledgment to the Department of Military and Veteran Affairs on the new Culinary Arts Class, which Supervisor Solis helped start at Bob Hope Patriotic Hall and a special thanks to Patina for providing shoes to veterans in the class at no cost.
- Homeless update: City of Southgate has units earmarked for homeless veterans as well as the cities of Bell and El Monte. Coordinating with the City of Los Angeles on homeless veteran units, and noted that veteran housing was now online at the facility located on Hoover and Adams.
- March 25, 2020, National Medal of Honor Day, The Eugene Obregon Foundation will be hosting the seventh annual event at the Wall of Honor (125 Paseo De La Plaza Los Angeles, CA) at 12pm. Supervisor Solis earmarked \$20,000 to ensure the names of those recipients of the Medal of Honor are properly added to the Wall of Honor.

Stephanie Wade, Congressional Representative for Congressman Cisneros of the 29th District, provided the following update:

- Update to the Stand Down Event hosted by the Congressman on April 25, 2020 in Fullerton, CA will be reaching out to determine if commissioners can attend, currently restructuring amid COVID-19 concerns.

Letia Sutton, Veteran, provide an update on issues encountered with the Department of Children and Family Services. Letia stated the following:

- There is no effective complaint process when social workers file false reports. Currently, in response to a false report, a survey/complaint can be filled out in an internal DCFS office, but the report stays internal. Approaching the Board of Supervisors to voice concerns is also an option, but concerns are directed to individual complaint is made about leading to retaliation.
- Letia is asking for veteran representation for those involved with the Department of Children and Family Services

In response to Letia, Commissioner Jackson-Kelley stated the commission spoke to Ms. Lewis who is willing to speak with Letia today regarding the issue.

Guest Speakers

Cristina Garcia, retired Army veteran and Program Coordinator U.S VETS - Women Vets on Point (W.V.O.P), provided a presentation on W.V.O.P highlighting the following:

- Educational Development Center and U.S Vets partnered to develop a program for women veterans, amidst the need as statistics show women vets are six times more likely to commit suicide. The Bob and Delores Hope Foundation fund the program and it aims to connect Los Angeles based women veterans experiencing mental health issues with resources and services.
- The program is going into Phase II Planning, which involves increasing staff and the amount of women veterans the program connects with via walk-ins, word of mouth, or online. Phase III Planning will focus on improving the program by building on brand identity, focusing on target audience using different communication channels, increase awareness, develop partnerships for funding, strengthening the team, and developing a site model for nation wide expansion.
- Current program goals: bridge the gap in effective care for women who have served our country and to promote, mobilize, and deliver information on mental health awareness
- In response to Cristina, Commissioner McDowell stated women are the most likely individuals to seek mental health and the problem of today will be understanding the growth of our women force structure and ensuring there are awareness campaigns to push resources the right way and commended Cristina Garcia on the program. Commissioner McDowell also stated the importance of tracking to assess the impact of donor contributions leading to continued support.
- In response to Cristina, Commissioner Banko thanked Cristina for serving as the program coordinator and highlighted that the UCLA Veteran Family Wellness center refers clients to WVOP. Commissioner Banko also

noted there are a lack of providers, but there is a movement in the field to train lay people to alleviate issues of access.

- In response to Cristina, Commissioner Tucker asked how many women are currently enrolled in the program. Cristina responded there are approximately 175. Commissioner Tucker asked if the end goal was employment for these women and what percentage is ready for employment. Cristina responded the U.S Vets Career Development Initiative is currently in place for employment and would follow up on the percentage of those ready for employment.

Department of Military and Veterans Affairs Report

Ruth Wong, Director, provided the following updates:

Awarded the Mental Health Service Act Proposition 63 Funding for fiscal year 2020-2021 and will receive \$400,000 for transition assistance and Outside the Wire mental health services in community colleges.

Culinary Arts new cohort started 3 weeks ago at Bob Hope Patriotic Hall with 12 students and a donor who provided shoes and L.A Trade Tech provides the actual uniforms, and the program is working on building more community partners.

Contacted by the Montford Point Marines in regards to hosting a display at Bob Hope Patriotic Hall honoring World War II Montford Point Marines.

Attended the California County Veteran Service Officer Conference in Sacramento, CA. The director is on the Legislative Committee for the association. In Sacramento, she met with Senator Bob Archuleta and Senator Scott Wilk advocating for increase to our County Veteran Service Offices throughout the state, looking at \$11 million annually to fund staff increases throughout California.

Will be testifying at the Senate Veteran Committee on March 24, 2020 advocating for the aforementioned increase and a letter has been sent to the Board of Supervisors to support the effort.

Bob Hope Patriotic Hall Parking and Residential feasibility study final report is due on March 21, 2020. Supervisors Solis initiated the study in hopes that housing and parking can be provided at the Hall, looking at 80 units and 195 parking stalls. Follow up report to come upon receipt of the report.

Safe Parking at Bob Hope Patriotic Hall has been delayed. The initial contract did not include a veteran priority and the contract was sent back and has been finalized. As soon as five veterans are signed up the program, it will start in the back lot, hours are from 9:00pm-6:00am.

Veteran Day Event, co-sponsored with 4th district held at LA Memorial Coliseum will take place on Saturday, November 7th and not on Veterans Day.

Advocating for the current bill in reference to military retiree pay. AB 2631 will exempt pay for military retirees, as California is one of seven states that still tax military retiree pay, this version of the bill differs from a prior version as the new bill will phase in over 5 years.

A flyer was passed around in reference to a new office, the Cerritos Field Office, Supervisors Hahn's District is paying for one veteran service officer, who will staff the office on Wednesdays and Thursdays from 8:00am-4:00pm.

Location for commission meeting in May has not been determined and the back up will be Bob Hope Patriotic Hall.

In response to Director Wong, Commissioner Elizalde stated Citrus College is reevaluating any activity and will not be able to confirm, will likely be suspended if coronavirus continues to grow and would like to keep an eye on college and VA operations. Director Wong stated she will be attending a County Department Directors meeting at 9:00am tomorrow where updates and direction will be given on the impact to employees and citizens of the county.

The VA is currently asking screening questions to all guests upon entrance into their facilities and restricting those under 18 from visiting the hospital. Those homeless, are vulnerable and there are concerns for this population as well.

In response to Director Wong, Commissioner Moore stated that students at Community Colleges and Universities are going online and the question was raised in regards to veteran housing allowance through the VA and there are concerns whether it will affect them. Commissioner McDowell stated certifying officials at each school would report attendance so they can get Post 9/11 and it would be surprising if the VA did not pay as it would affect hundreds to thousands of veterans.

Agenda Items that are Deferred to Next Month's Meeting

- Meeting locations for dates without not selected
- No official business will be conducted at the joint meeting with the Orange County Veterans Advisory Commission at the VA in Long Beach
- Commissioners will email Chair Patricia Jackson-Kelley in regards to agenda items for the meeting in May

Follow-up on Veteran Issues

None.

Good of the Order

Chair Jackson-Kelley stated she is working with the community for Women's History Month and held a screening for the Triple 8 documentary in Orange County and is scheduled to host an additional screening at Bob Hope Patriotic Hall on March 26, 2020. She also stated will be attending Mayor Garcetti's Women's History Event tomorrow at 12pm. She is also working with local libraries to show a screening of the Triple 8.

Vice Chair Elizalde expressed a reminder for everyone to take extreme caution as we move forward in public spaces and heed the advice of the CDC regarding COVID-19.

Commissioner Banko stated in the last meeting there was a comment in regards to professional versus commission appointment and issues that may come up in the course of the commission meetings. In her role as director for the UCLA Veteran Family Wellness Center, it is her job to identify and address needs create responsive program and innovate based on research and collaboration of partnership and wanted to make clear that if the role is mentioned as a commissioner it is for the greatest good and to alleviate suffering.

Commissioner Moore stated that L.A Veterans Resource Expo will be held on July 24, 2020 and she is glad to be on board the commission.

Commissioner Lasser extended thanks to General Wong for the bylaw sample he received and is working on fine-tuning the bylaws for the Los Angeles Veterans Advisory Commission. He attended the University of Southern California Tribute to Military and Veteran Event and will be working on getting commissioners invited to future events. He also a planning session for the 60th Torrance Armed Forces parade sponsored by the Department of Defense and the lead agency is the U.S Coast Guard and will share more information when available. He also mentioned Sector Long Beach LA Headquarters Regional Coast Guard at Terminal Island will be hosting a change of command on May 21, 2020 and will be sending invites in the future. 61st Air Force Base Changing command in July as well.

Commissioner Tucker stated the VA is suspending enrollment with new GI to the University of Phoenix, Career Education Cooperation, Dublin University, and the University of Temple amid findings of legal violations. He also reminded the commission of the Second Chance/ Fair Chance Act and the importance of to the veteran community. Commissioner Tucker handed out a flyer in regards to best practices amid the COVID-19 outbreak.

Meeting adjourned at 3:02 p.m.

Deshawn Yancy
Intern
March 11, 2020